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ABSTRACT

To help resolve the language of instruction dilemma in Hong Kong schools, this paper examines the hypothetical effect of government, business, and university language policy and practice on individuals' choice of intructional medium. While government policy has always allowed schools and students to choose either Chinese or English, most have chosen English. Bilingual education studies have concentrated on functional aspects of language, excluding sociopolitical variables that make English a higher status language. This study assumes a conflict paradigm perspective: Chinese should become a more popular instructional medium if more educational and political opportunities demanding Chinese proficiency existed. A survey was conducted to determine language(s) preferred by three samples of respondents: 136 Hong Kong primary students, 74 University of Hong Kong student teachers, and 36 secondary and college teachers in Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, and Thailand. Results show students' preference for English rising with each grade level. Sociopolitical setting strongly influences individuals' choice of medium, and universities affect language preference more than business or government. Clearly, students choose to learn in a language with easier access to power. This situation will not change until the infrastructure recognizes both languages as equal. (MLH)

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THE IMPACT OF GOVERNMENTAL AND INSTITUTIONAL LANGUAGE POLICY AND PRACTICES ON THE INDIVIDUAL'S CHOICE OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL MEDIUM IN SCHOOLS IN HONG KONG

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A popular issue confronting both the government and the public today is: What should be the medium of instruction in Hong Kong schools? In order to throw some light on this important and complicated issue, the present study was designed. Superficially it seems that students and schools have the free choice of the instructional medium. However, this study takes quite a different viewpoint by examining the hypothetical impact of the language policy and practices in the government, businesses, and universities on the individual's choice of intructional medium in secondary schools. Reynolds (1984) raised a similar issue by questioning whether government's language policy would have any appreciable effect on the linguistic behaviour of the population at large. Results of this study would have important implications in the formulation of the language policy in Hong Kong.

Functional Studies

For a long time the policy of the Hong Kong Government has always permitted schools and students to choose freely for themselves the language of instruction, and since most of the secondary school students in Hong Kong so far have chosen to learn through the medium of English, it is sometimes concluded that the popularity of using English as an instructional medium reflects simply the genuine choice of the students or schools and therefore the Government should continue its non-intervention policy by allowing the invisible hand of the market force to decide on the language mode of instruction.

However, with the implementation of nine years of compulsory education, it has often been reported that a large proportion of students in fact experienced learning difficulties, particularly with instruction through the medium of English. Some studies (Tam & Yuen, 1985; Mok, 1985) also reported that students showed better performance when tested in Chinese than when being tested in the medium of English, particularly for the low achievers in schools. If it is true that learning in the mother tongue is educationally more effective, why is it then that the majority of

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secondary school students prefer to learn through English which is their second language?

In response to the growing demand for formulating a language policy appropriate to the local needs, there has been recently quite a large number of bilingual education studies, conducted not only by individuals, but also by the Government. In comparing the results of these studies, it is also important to consider the goal as well as the paradigm under which these studies are formulated. According to Kuhn (1971), the concept of paradigm means the theoretical framework or way that scholars view a field of study. The implication is that studies viewed in the same perspective would see things similarly, for example, perceiving a similar set of independent and dependent variables, and ignoring other variables that might be important in the context of a different paradigm. Thus, as Paulston (1980) has neatly put:

> It is only through an examination of the various theoretical frameworks used to explain and predict the phenomena of bilingual education that we can put into perspective the conflicting or at times complementary research questions and the anticipated solutions as they relate to the dimensions of bilingual education. (p.16)

In terms of the paradigms adopted, most of the studies on bilingual education in Hong Kong so far reported were based on the functional paradigm, one assumption of which is that schools give equal chance to meritorious students. From the functional perspective, the main problem relating to bilingual education, that is, the low standard of language achievement of students, is caused by the existing INEQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES, and the solution of this problem of low achievement lies within the school. Thus functional studies attempted to compare the relative effectiveness of teaching in terms of different language modes and teaching methods which were seen as the independent variables, and the dependent variables were generally student achievement, interest, and attitudes. In other words, the pattern of bilingual education is the INDEPENDENT variable, and achievement is the DEPENDENT variable. These studies attempted to achieve a better understanding of the language issue and a better formulation of the language policy by studying the relationship between the patterns of bilingual education and learning. Even the latest proposed policy of positive discrimination as described in the Education Commission Report No. 1 (1984, Ch.III) followed this functional paradigm and estimated that a majority of the Anglo-Chinese schools would be able to attract students to learn through the medium of Chinese with additional staff and enriched treatment conditions. By virtue of their interest in the instructional variables,

functional studies can show HOW a language mode is to function effectively. However, by ignoring the socio-political variables in society, they are almost useless in explaing WHY a particular language have been chosen or should be used as the instructional medium. Paulston (1980, p.33) remarked that "unless we try in some way to account for the sociohistorical, cultural, and economic-political factors which lead to certain forms of bilingual education, we will never understand the consequences of that education".

Conflict Studies

Although the policy of positive discrimination is still being considered by the government, from the conflict paradigm's viewpoint, it can already be predicted at this initial stage that this kind of instructional remedies alone would be inadequate to persuade the majority of students to learn in the medium of Chinese. The reason is that, from the perspective of the conflict paradigm, the problems of bilingual education, such as the low proficiency of a particular language, for example, Chinese, is caused indirectly by the INEQUALITY OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITIES relating to that particular language, and so the solutions of these problems lie outside the school domain. The conflict paradigm (Paulston, 1976) emphasizes the inherent instability of social systems and the resulting conflicts for power and interest. In this competition for power, a term here defined as the capacity of doing, which may be in terms of economic, political, social, etc., it is understandable that individuals would prefer to learn in the language (particularly when that language is also the Language of Wider Communication - i.e. LWC) used by the ruling elites because proficiency in that language would enable them to participate; and being able to participate improves their chance to power. In other words, it would be pointless to ask students to change to instruction in Chinese when English enjoys a higher status in terms of better opportunities to study in higher institutions and to work in the government. In this context, the impact of the language practices of the government and that of the universities on the choice of instructional medium in the secondary schools is significant because by controlling access to qualifications, these institutions are also controlling access to power and authority.

It is interesting to note here that this theory also bears similarity to the theory of behavioral shaping by the use of rewards and punishment in the sense that government and tertiary institutions shape the individual's behaviour in language choice by controlling the access to qualifications. In fact Weinstein (1983) has already pointed out the effect of governmental intervention of language choice:

> Government intervenes in the linguistic market place by deciding to choose a policy and then to implement it by allocating resources and by sanctioning results. The entire process from the idea of intervention, a political matter,

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> to observable change in behavior, a linguistic and social matter, is language planning. (p.37)

Pertaining to the factors affecting ethnic group relationships, Schermerhorn (1970) also postulated that "the degree of control exercised by dominant groups over access to scarce resources by subordinate groups in a given society" is one of the important independent factors for consideration. Paulston (1980) rated Schermerhorn's theoretical framework as highly applicable to the design of bilingual studies in the perspective of the conflict paradigm. Thus, the conflict paradigm's viewpoint of bilingual education is that the socio-political factors are the independent variables, and the pattern of bilingual education is the dependent variable, in the sense that the educational patterns depend on the socio-political settings.

As a corollary of the above, whenever there is a choice of different languages of instruction, the one used by the ruling elites would be the one that enjoyed the higher status. Furthermore, from the perspective of the conflict paradigm, conflict in language is in fact conflict for power, in the sense that when one group of elites gained power, the language used by this elite group would likely become the language of high status. Following this line of reasoning, the individual's choice of the language of instruction would change when the government and the higher institutions shift to another language mode of operation. Therefore, it is indeed doubtful that the positive discrimination policy as described in the Education Commission Report No. 1 would work when admission to universities remains to be based on results of examinations conducted in the medium of English.

Method

Unlike most other studies on bilingual education in Hong Kong, this present study takes the perspective of the conflict paradigm and argues that the individual's choice of the instructional medium is affected significantly by the visible hand of the supply force, such as the qualifications required for government posts and for admission to tertiary institutions of learning. Viewed from the conflict perspective, English as an instructional medium would be popular here as long as the government uses English as the working language and the entrance requirements to tertiary institutions put greater emphasis on English than Chinese. As a corollary, Chinese would become a more popular instructional medium in schools if politically and educationally there are more opportunities (i.e. "power") for those who have chosen Chinese as the instructional medium.

Since it is impossible to manipulate the socio-political settings to conduct this study, different hypothetical patterns of language use and practices in the Government, in the business

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sector, and in the higher institutions of learning were identified. These patterns of hypothetical language use and practices constitute the different levels of the independent variable for this study. As indicated in Table 1, the first

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Insert Table 1 about here

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pattern of language use is "EEE" where "E" means the use of English. In this "EEE" notation, the first "E" refers to the language being used in the government, the second "E" refers to the language being used in most business firms, and the third "E" refers to the language being used in the higher institutions of learning. In the case of "CCC", Chinese would be used in all cases.

In conducting this study, six versions of a questionnaire, with each version describing a particular language pattern, were constructed. Apart from the difference in terms of the hypothetical language pattern, the rest of the content of the questionnaires across the different versions is identical. The respondent to each questionnaire was asked to indicate his or her own choice of the language of learning and examination under a particular language pattern. The format of the questionnaire is similar to the one used by Mackey (1970). A four-point scale was used to represent the language mode preferred by the respondents:

Scale Value	Language Mode	Notation
1	Completely in English	E
2	Essentially in English, but Chinese is used for explaining the more difficult parts	Ec
3	Essentially in Chinese, but for technical terms, important words and phrases, English translation is also given	Ce
4	Completely in Chinese	C

In addition, the respondents would put down "0" for non-applicable situations. In the case when the respondent was not a native speaker of Chinese, the word "Chinese" in the above scale value description was replaced by the term "mother-tongue" in the questionnaire.

In this study, three convenient samples of respondents were used. The first sample consisted of 136 Form V students from one government and one subsidized Anglo-Chinese secondary schools in Hong Kong. The second sample consisted of 74 teachers currently

registered in the Certificate-in-Education programme in the University of Hong Kong, and the third sample consisted of 39 teachers of secondary and tertiary institutions in Indonesia, Malaysia, Pakistan, Philippines, and Thailand. Due to the small sample size of teachers from each of these foreign countries, the answers from these different places were collapsed.

The data obtained were analysed at both the descriptive and inferential levels. The general non-linear correlation (i.e. eta square) together with the F-test was computed in order to estimate the degree of relationship between a nominal variable (i.e. the six patterns of language use) and the continuous variable of language choice. The F-tests were also used to compare group means. Due to the large number of null hypotheses to be tested, all tests of significance were made at the 0.001 level. Theoretically, as predicted from the conflict paradigm's viewpoint, there should be a high degree of positive relationship between the language pattern in a particular socio-political setting and the language choice of the individual.

Results and Discussion

Results of the answers from the students are shown in Table 2.

Insert Table 2 about here

In this table, the abbreviations in the first column represent the different language patterns. The notation "E" is for English, "C" for Chinese, and "B" for bilingual. The bracketed number in the first column indicates the sample size of the respondents receiving a particular version of the questionnaire. Thus, there were 25 students receiving the "EEE" version of the questionnaire. The other columns show the mean (indicated by "M") and the standard deviation (indicated by "s") of the language choice for Primary 3, Primary 6, Form 3 and Form 6 respectively. In all of these cell means, the higher the value, the greater is the preference for the mother-tongue; and the lower the value, the greater is the preference for English as a medium of instruction.

The bottom row in this table indicates the eta square ( ) which shows the relationship between the given language patterns and the individual's choice of the language for a particular grade level. The value of eta square varies between 0 and 1, with a higher value indicating a stronger relationship. Results in Table 2 seem to support the following conclusions:

1. The lower the grade level, the weaker is the relationship

between individual's language choice and the pattern of language use in a given socio-political setting. For the case of Primary 3, the eta square value is only 0.13, and statistically insignificant at the 0.001 level. As can be seen quite obviously in the second column, the mean scores range between 3.16 (for the EEE group) to 3.79 (for the CCC group), indicating that irrespective of the language pattern in a particular socio-political setting, most students prefer to use the mother-tongue for teaching and learning at the Primary 3 level.

2. However, there is a general tendency for this demand for the use of the mother-tongue to decrease as the grade level increases. Take for instance, the mean scores for the EEE group drop from 3.16 to 1.18 between Primary 3 and Form 6, and even for the CCC group, the corresponding mean scores dropped from 3.79 to 2.81. In order words, students prefer to use more English in the senior forms.

3. Given it is true that the demand to learn through English increases with the grade level, the language pattern of a given socio-political setting clearly affects the individual's choice of the instructional medium. This is clear from the fact that the mean values of the CCC group are significantly ($p<.001$) higher than that of the EEE group at all grade levels.

4. Although not significant at the 0.001 level, there is a tendency for institutions of higher learning to exert more influence, compared with that of the business sector and the government, on the individual's choice of the instructional medium in the secondary schools.

5. Results of the data from Hong Kong teachers and those from teachers overseas support the students' data, as shown in Table 3. Therefore, the conclusions drawn from the students' data are also applicable to these data sets.

Insert Table 3 about here

The findings of this study indicate clearly that the individual's language choice is affected significantly by the hypothetical language pattern of a particular socio-political setting. It seems that the hypothesis that students choose to learn in a medium with easier access to power is supported. Maybe this is just a characteristic of human nature to do things with a better pay-off. Although the Education Commission Report No. 1 suggested that, by the allocation of more teaching resources, about 80% of students should learn through the medium of Chinese, it seems from the viewpoint of the conflict paradigm that such instructional measures alone would be necessary but not sufficient. What is more important is that there should be an infra-structure which allows students from both English and

Chinese streams to have equal opportunities to share resources in the government and in tertiary education. In other words, unless both languages enjoy the same status and opportunities to power, the separation (particularly at an early stage) of students into the Anglo-Chinese and Chinese streams would produce unsatisfactory and discriminatory results.

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Table 1
Language Situations

Type	Language Used in Government	Most Business Firms	Higher Instit.	SUMMARY
1	E	E	E	EEE
2	E	C	C	ECC
3	C	E	C	CEC
4	C	C	E	CCE
5	C	C	C	CCC
6	B	B	B	BBB

Notations Used:

E = Completely in English
C = Completely in Chinese
B = Bilingual, with both English and Chinese

TABLE 2
Summary Statistics of Choice of Instructional Medium Preferred By Hong Kong Form V Students

Socio-Political Setting		Instructional Medium in P. 3	P. 6	F. 3	F. 6
1. EEE	M	3.16	2.35	1.72	1.18
(n=25)	s	.66	.64	.46	.34
2. ECC		3.75	3.11	2.62	2.09
(18)		.43	.66	.67	.77
3. CEC		3.67	3.12	2.60	1.96
(22)		.36	.52	.48	.64
4. CCE		3.67	2.83	2.19	1.61
(23)		.42	.57	.40	.57
5. CCC		3.79	3.49	3.12	2.81
(25)		.46	.50	.65	.82
6. BBB		3.43	2.69	2.10	1.56
(23)		.52	.50	.38	.57
Summary Statistics	η^2 =	.13	.30	.51	.65
	F =	3.89	11.22	24.90	49.24
		(n.s.)	($p<.001$)	($p<.001$)	($p<.001$)
		(d.f. for F = 5, 130)			

TABLE 3
Summary Statistics of Choice of Instructional Medium
Preferred By Teachers

Socio-Political Setting		Instructional Medium in P. 3	P. 6	F. 3	F. 6
Hong Kong Teachers					
1.	EEE	3.27	2.82	1.66	1.15
	(n=11)	.90	.87	.66	.34
2.	ECC	3.88	3.81	3.11	2.29
	(14)	.29	.31	.39	.77
3.	CEC	3.77	3.54	2.75	2.21
	(13)	.44	.66	.77	.99
4.	CCE	3.77	3.55	2.93	1.89
	(12)	.38	.70	.69	.72
5.	CCC	3.95	3.90	3.35	3.01
	(13)	.12	.16	.51	.64
6.	BBB	3.66	3.57	2.95	2.35
	(11)	.47	.50	.72	.89
	Summary Statistics	η^2 = .18	.28	.43	.36
		F = 3.00 (n.s.)	5.17 ($p \leq .001$)	10.05 ($p \leq .001$)	7.71 ($p \leq .001$)
		(d.f. for F = 5, 68)			
Teachers in Neighbouring Countries					
1.	EEE	2.63	2.06	1.56	1.27
	(7)	.48	.47	.44	.43
2.	EMM	3.30	2.67	2.23	2.18
	(6)	.76	.76	.75	.75
3.	MEM	3.40	3.20	2.97	2.65
	(6)	.80	.75	.52	.61
4.	MME	3.39	3.04	2.39	1.84
	(7)	.66	.52	.45	.57
5.	MMM	3.77	3.40	3.13	2.92
	(6)	.41	.83	.89	.77
6.	BBB	3.16	2.64	2.30	1.91
	(7)	.61	.38	.41	.39
	Summary Statistics	η^2 = .26	.37	.47	.50
		F = 2.34 (n.s.)	3.88 (n.s.)	5.94 ($p \leq .001$)	6.49 ($p < .001$)
		(d.f. for F = 5, 33)			